

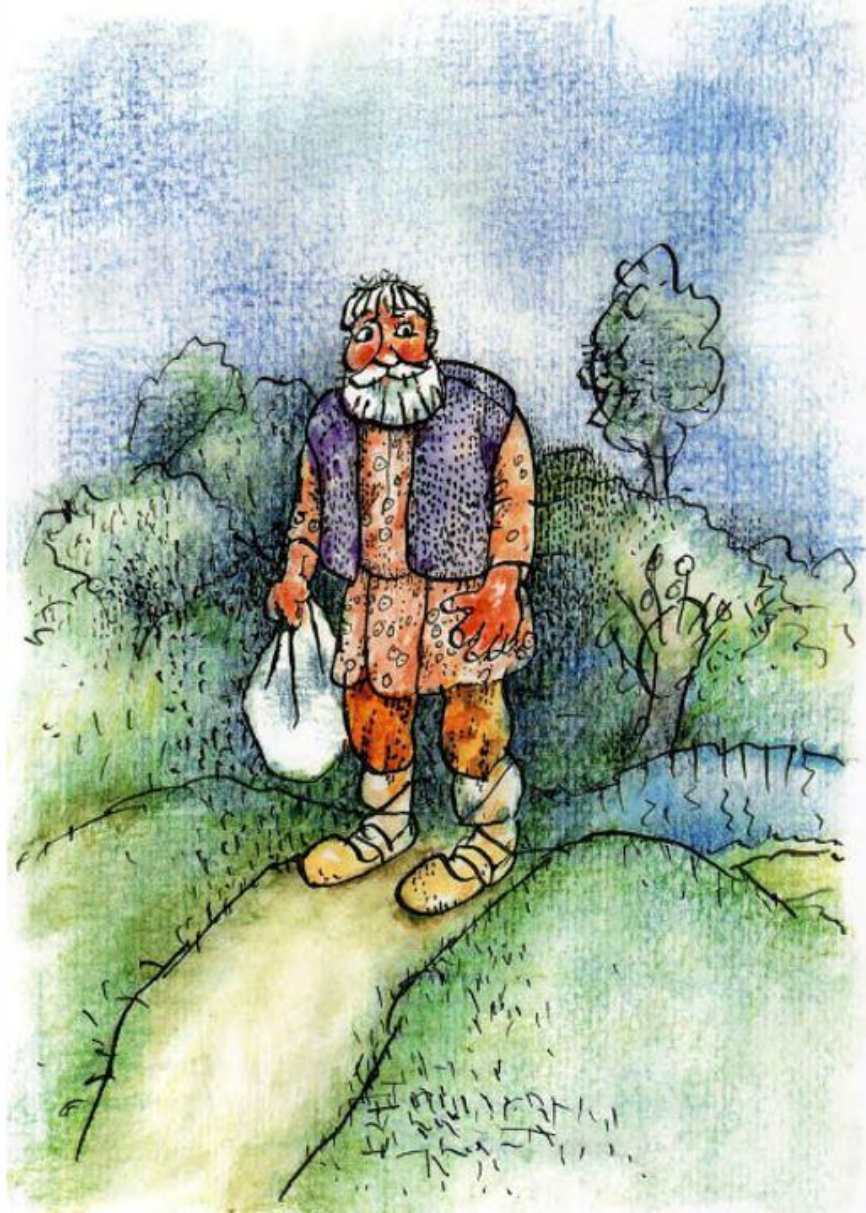
Boris  
Zakhoder

# THE FOX'S RULING

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It happened long, long ago at a time when wild animals could talk and even the trees put in a word every now and again.

A peasant was walking through the wood when he saw that a great tree had fallen and was crushing a snake under one heavy branch. The snake was struggling and writhing but

could not break free.

She saw the peasant and called out to him:

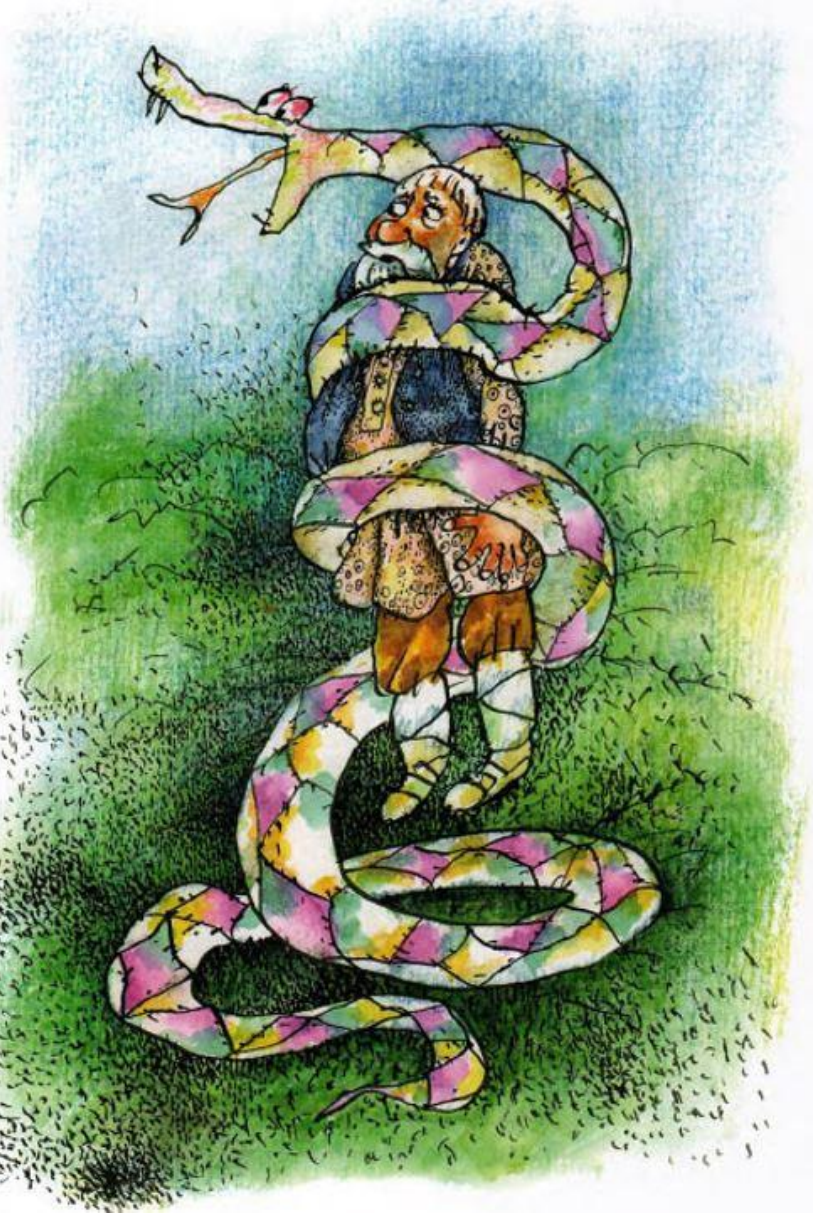
“Have pity on me, help me to get free! I shall know how to show my gratitude.”

The peasant took pity on the snake and raised the branch. Now the snake was a poisonous one. No sooner was she free than - pshsh! - she was up onto his shoulders, had wound herself round his neck and was hissing in his ear:

“Now I shall bite you!”

So much for the gratitude of snakes!





The peasant said:

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Viper, I have saved you from death and you want to kill me!"

But the snake only repeated: "I'll bite, I'll bite!"

"Oh no, you don't," said the peasant, "that won't do at all. Let us call in a judge. He will give us a ruling which of us is right. We'll ask the first person we see."

The snake agreed. They went into the forest and who should they meet but Red Fox.

They told her exactly what had happened.

"Be our judge, Red Fox," said the peasant. "Only judge fairly, in good faith."

"All right," the Fox replied. "I'll be your judge. Only I can't give you a quick verdict, just like that. First I must see exactly what happened. Let's go back to the place where you first fell out with one another. I'll give you my ruling there."



They came back to where they had started. Judge Fox said:

“Now go back to the places where you both were when the disagreement began.”

The peasant raised the branch, the snake slid back to where she had been and he immediately let go of the branch so that the snake was again trapped.

“And now,” said Judge Fox, “get out as best you can, Viper! That’s my ruling.”

I don’t know about the snake, but the peasant was quite satisfied.

“Thank you,” he said. “Thank you, Judge Fox, for judging between us so fairly, in good faith!”

The Fox answered:

“Not so fast! Oh no, you won’t get away with just a ‘thank you’. I shall require a sack of good things from you for my trouble.”

The peasant was surprised.

“We never made any such bargain,” he said.

But the Fox persisted: give, give, give!

“So that’s the sort you are!” thought the peasant. “Well, just you wait. I’ll teach you a lesson.”



“All right,” he said. “Let’s go back to my house. I’ll give you a sack of good things.”

He went back home, bundled his dogs in a sack, tied it up tightly and carried it out to the Fox.

The Fox was delighted, for the sack was very heavy.

“Aha,” thought the Fox. “The peasant’s been really generous!”

She shouldered the sack and made off to her lair. But curious to see what was inside she sat down on the road and untied the sack. Out leapt the dogs and attacked her, tearing

her fur coat to shreds.

The Fox ran home and sat licking at her torn fur and muttering to herself: “My Grandfather was never a judge and my father was never a judge, so why the devil did I go setting myself up as one?”